

BARCELONA, TWO THOUSAND YEARS



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ANNIVERSARY.

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To a thousand-year-old city like Barcelona, the celebration of the Olympic Games is an important event.

Inhabited by the *Iberi* and familiar to the Carthaginians —“the Punic Barcino”, as the classics say—, the city was founded by the Romans, who also gave it its name, Barcino, later Barcinona, and then Barcelona. Its foundation can be traced back to just before the birth of Christ; 1992, therefore, could almost be our city’s two thousandth anniversary.

Colonia Iulia Augusta Faventia Paterna Barcino was a small Roman colonial city, with ramparts, baths, amphitheatre and a temple dedicated to Augustus, situated on the Mons Taber. It was converted to Christianity early on, and had an episcopal see, and the fact that it was walled and had a bishop led to its being made the capital of the short-lived kingdom of the Visigoths in 415, under King Ataulf and his Queen, Gala Placidia. Occupied briefly by the Moslems, it was reconquered by the

Franks, who made it the capital of the County of Barcelona. The dynasty of the House of Barcelona governed Catalonia from the time of Count Guifré *el Pelós*, in 878, till the death of Martí *l’Humà*, in 1410.

Throughout this period, Barcelona was subjected to the ups and downs of history. Razed to the ground by al-Mansur and his Moslem armies in 985, it was reconquered by Count Borrell II, under whom Catalonia became independent from the Frankish kings. It is in fact this

year that we are celebrating the thousandth anniversary of this event.

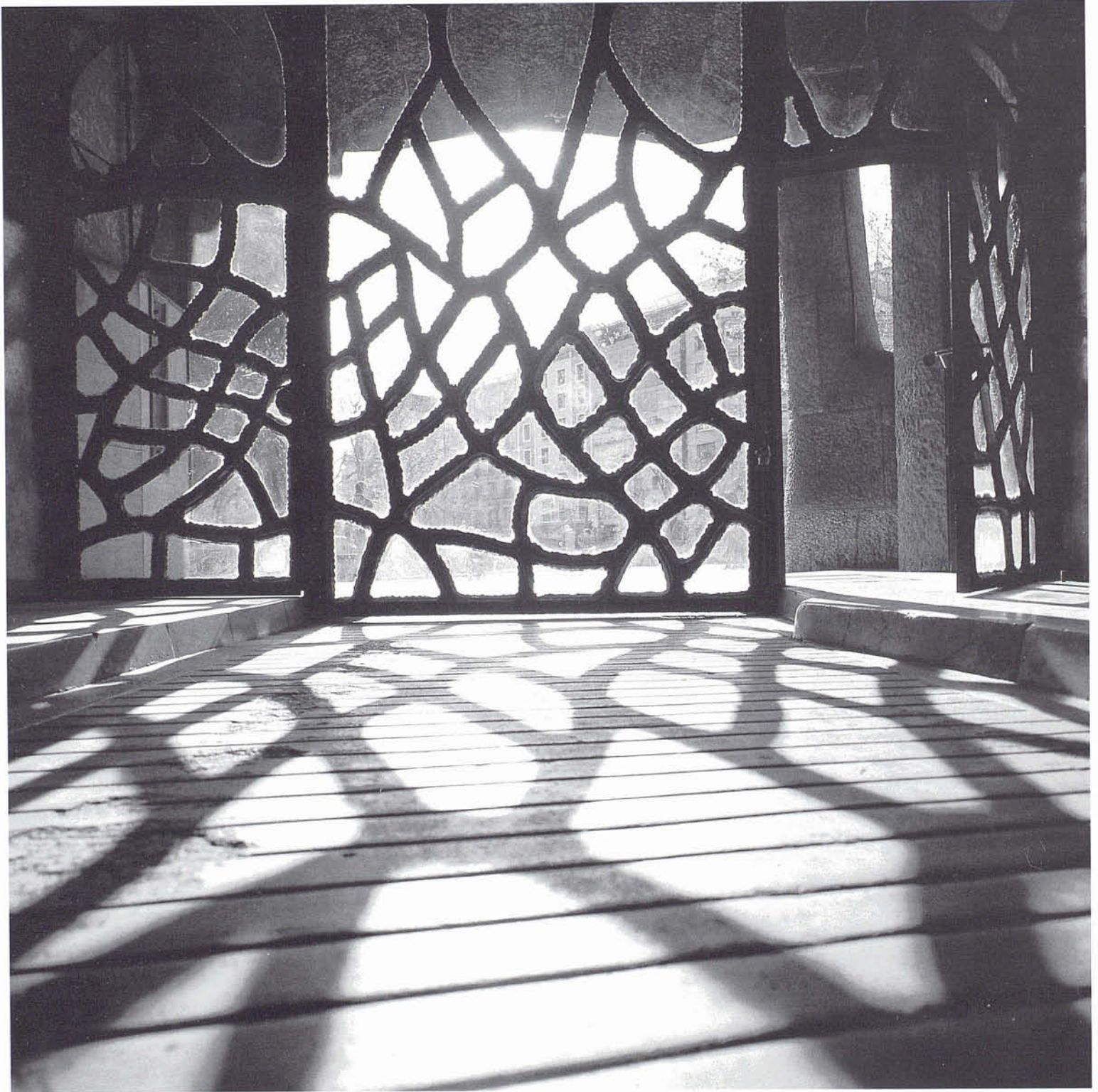
The Kings of Aragon had their court there and made long visits to the city. Their memory is perpetuated by the Palau Reial and its magnificent Sala del Tinell. In 1236, Jaume I set up the *Consell de Cent*, Barcelona's maximum government institution, and built the first medieval walls. Pere el Cerimoniós reformed them, and during his reign, work was started on the *Llotja* market building and the church of Santa Maria del Mar was completed. This splendid building is also known as the Cathedral of the Shore. Shortly before this, Queen Elisenda of Montcada had promoted the construction of the monastery of Santa Maria de Pedralbes, now an oasis of peace in the midst of the turmoil of the modern city. But not all was stone: Joan I, «the lover of gentility», established the *Jocs Florals* in 1393, a literary award which was revived in 1859 and which has been maintained down to the present day, as a homage to womankind and poetry in Catalan. The economic life of the city was not forgotten: in 1401 the *Taula de Canvi* was created and the foundations laid for the Hospital de la Santa Creu.

The city survived crises, plagues and wars. In 1493, Ferdinand and Isabella, known as the "Catholic King and Queen", received Christopher Columbus there on his return from America. In 1519 their grandson, the Emperor Charles I, celebrated the Chapter of the Order of the Golden Fleece in the Choir of Barcelona Cathedral, and set out on the conquest of Tunis from the city's port. Saint Ignatius of Loyola had fond memories of the time he spent in Barcelona, where he kept up good friendships. Relations between the citizens of Barcelona and the Austrian monarchy were not always good. Although courts were still held there following the ancient tradition of the Catalan kings, the famous revolt "*dels Segadors*" (of the Reapers), during the so-called "Bloody Corpus", led to a violent confrontation between the citizens of Barcelona and King Philip IV of Castile in 1840. The country was ruined by a long war, in which the French fought alongside the Catalans against the Castilians. Before this, Catalonia had already been broken up in 1659, by the Peace Treaty of the Pyrenees, that gave France the counties of Rosselló, Vallespir and Cerdanya. Some years later, the new Bourbon dynasty was implanted in Catalonia after a bitter struggle in which

the French fought alongside Philip IV's Castilians. Barcelona surrendered on 11th September 1714, after a heroic siege. The date is still commemorated today as the Catalan national holiday, not to celebrate a defeat, but as a reminder that the Catalans and the citizens of Barcelona had a freedom and a set of institutions that were taken from us by force and which we have never for one moment renounced.

Soon afterwards, the new dynasty, originally so badly received, found a king who was to make it more popular. In 1778, Charles III granted free trade with America, and the peace with Turkey was the beginning of a period of peace throughout the Mediterranean. Barcelona, which had had an important network of consulates during the Middle Ages and whose shipyards had put everything they had into the victory over the Turks at Lepanto in 1571, now saw her port filled once more with sails and people. The new *Llotja*, or market building, and the Customs building—now the seat of the provincial governor's office, in the old Plaça del Palau—are signs of this prosperity. The War against the the French was kind to the city. The civil wars that tore Spain apart during the nineteenth century affected our city very little, protected as it was by its impressive walls. The civic disturbances and riots were a greater cause for concern for the inhabitants. Although it was declared a *plaça forta*, or stronghold, and was put under military rule, its cultural life seethed. 1847 saw the inauguration of the Gran Teatre del Liceu, one of the greatest opera halls in the world. In 1859, Monturiol tested his submarine "Ictineo" in the waters of the port; a few years before, in 1848, the first railway train joined Barcelona and Mataró. A brilliant town-planner, Ildefons Cerdà, got approval for his famous *Pla de l'Eixample* in 1859, after work had started on the demolition of the walls that corseted the city. Barcelona grew at a remarkable rate, and spread over the land between the old walls and the hills that border her, between the rivers Besòs and Llobregat. In 1883, Jacint Verdaguer, the great poet who restored the Catalan language to its place in world literature, wrote his famous poem "Ode to Barcelona". The *Exposició Universal*, celebrated with great ceremony in 1888, marked the transition from a closed, inward-looking city, to one that set its sights on the rest of Europe. That same year, the UGT, the

first trade union, was founded there. This European projection can also be seen in the introduction of European sports and in their popularity with the inhabitants. Barcelona Football Club was founded in 1899, and just under a century later has over 100,000 members and one of the biggest stadiums in Europe. But there were also difficult moments: in 1909, social unrest led to the outbreak of violence known as the "Tragic Week", which gave the world an unfavourable impression of the Catalan capital. But the country gradually recovered its economy, its culture and its government institutions. In 1914, Barcelona became the seat of the newly born *Mancomunitat de Catalunya*, whose president was the great Prat de la Riba. In 1929, the city held the *Exposició Internacional*, which changed the face of Montjuïc. One of the most important buildings there is the stadium, where top level athletics events and international football matches are held. In 1931, Francesc Macià proclaimed the Catalan Republic from the Palau de la Generalitat. In 1936, the city organized the Popular Olympics, but the war that broke out that year turned Barcelona into a battle ground. The air raids of 1938 will go down in history as one of the great crimes of our age. The city, now much changed, tried to recover its personality after 1939. The new totalitarian regime tried to erase the Catalan language and culture. The city's population grew to more than a million inhabitants, many of whom had come from outside Catalonia in search of work and a place to live. The XXXV International Eucharistic Congress, in 1962, gave a boost to the city, with the construction of new houses and the creation of new hope. Gradually, the political situation returned to normal, and on 11th September 1977, a peaceful demonstration of more than a million people marched through the streets of Barcelona demanding the "Statute of Autonomy". On 23rd October of the same year, President Josep Tarradellas returned from exile. Not long afterwards, the first democratic municipal elections since 1936 were held. The life of the city recovered its old vitality, and on 17th October 1986, as a result of the effort on the part of all the authorities, Barcelona was named as host to the 1992 Olympic Games. This could be the start of a splendid future for all the citizens of Barcelona, and for all Catalans, for we must not forget that this great city, Barcelona, is the capital of Catalonia. ■



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